DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 086 403 24 RC 007 550

AUTHOR Uxer, John E.
TITLE Regional Service Centers Serving Both Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Areas.
INSTITUTION New Mexico State Univ., University Park. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
BUREAU NO BR-6-2469
PUB DATE 1 Feb 74
CONTRACT OEC-1-6-062469-1574(10)
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the National Conference, National Federation for the Improvement of Rural Education, January 30-31, February 1, 1974, Las Vegas, Nevada

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Community Services; Educational Equipment; *Educational Resources; *Instructional Materials; Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Metropolitan Areas; *Regional Programs; Rural Areas; *Rural Education

ABSTRACT

In this paper concerning the function of regional service centers serving both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan schools, no effort was made to justify service centers, to compare and describe services in the different states, or to review the literature relating to service centers or intermediate units. Instead, this document presents some introspective considerations for regional service centers' identification of ways to become integral, useful partners in the education enterprise. The topic of discussions are (1) rationale for regional center services; (2) regional service center services: general services (planning, awareness, specialized staffing and liaison) and other services (instructional services, instructional support services, and administrative services). The report concludes that, although there is ample evidence that documents the value of regional service agencies to nonmetropolitan schools, particularly the smaller ones, the more troublesome task is to discover and operationalize services which provide additional advantages to larger schools. (FF)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 086403

REGIONAL SERVICE CENTERS SERVING BOTH METROPOLITAN AND NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS

by

JOHN E. UXER, Ed.D.
Region XIX Education Service Center
El Paso, Texas

presented at

National Conference Sponsored by the National Federation for the Improvement of Rural Education,
January 30-31 and February 1, 1974
Las Vegas, Nevada

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CLEARINGHOUSE ON RURAL EDUCATION AND SMALL SCHOOLS (CRESS)

New Mexico State University

Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003

This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant with the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under Government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

The booklet may be duplicated in whole or in part, whenever such duplication is in the interest of bettering education.

RC007550

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Rationale for Regional Center Services 3

Regional Service Center Services 4

General Services 6

Planning 6

Awareness 7

Specialized Staffing 8

Liaison 8

Other Services 9

Instructional Services 9

Driver Education 9

Special Education 10

Other Instructional Services 11

Instructional Support Services 11

Administrative Services 13

Conclusions 14

References 15

REGIONAL SERVICE CENTERS SERVING BOTH METROPOLITAN AND NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS

Introduction

One of the most treasured and revered tenets of America is that of equal educational opportunity for its inhabitants. In pursuit of this goal, particularly in the last two decades, the American people have built an educational system second to none other in the world. Hundreds of new school houses have been built; new curricula have been developed; more and better trained teachers have become available; and state departments of education have been enlarged tremendously. A cursory glance at the education profession reveals many additional efforts to provide equal educational opportunity.

Such progress has not, however, been accomplished without problems. Cultural and ethnic differences have been difficult to overcome, particularly in certain regions of the country; finances have lagged behind the demand for improved programs; and traditional practices have stubbornly resisted change. From a global perspective, perhaps the most persistent problem which affects educational services to children is school district organization. According to information on file in the U. S. Office of Education, 33.1 per cent of the school systems in the United States have enrollments of fewer than 300 students and a whopping 77.9 per cent enroll fewer than 2,500 students. Only 4.3 per cent of the school systems in the United States have enrollments of 10,000 or more students, and only 1.1 per cent have enrollments exceeding 25,000 students!

The critical point here is not whether there are still too many or too small school districts, although that question deserves attention in another forum. With equality of educational opportunity as a referent, the important question is, "What size student population is required to provide the educational services essential to the education of children?" Whether or not the students comprising such a population are all enrolled in the same administrative unit is rather unimportant if provisions are made to combine the enrollments for the purpose of cooperatively purchasing needed services. The most prevalent arrangement for such cooperation has been the intermediate educational unit or regional service unit. A rather comprehensive examination of the development and functions of Intermediate Educational Units was conducted by Benson and Barber and will soon be released by ERIC CRESS. Further information about this report may be obtained from ERIC-CRESS, New Mexico State University.

In most states where extensive study has occurred, a median student population of 60,000-75,000 is required to develop maximum services. Assuming that this deduction is reasonably accurate, less than 1.1 per cent of the public school systems in the United States would be able to provide maximum services independently. Therefore, two maxims have emerged: 1) most school systems must participate in cooperative purchase of services in order to provide maximum educational services to children, and 2) arrangements for providing cooperative purchasing (such as regional education service centers) will continue to develop.

Rationale for Regional Center Services

The philosophy upon which service centers are developed influences greatly the kind and scope of services offered through the center. In states where the philosophy dictates that service centers are purely service organizations, the array of services will be quite different from the states which delegate administrative and regulatory functions.

Although opinion seems to be divided over the issue of whether regional education service agencies should be purely service or service and regulatory, the primary function should be that of service. Of the twelve states having the most advanced systems of regional service centers, five perform both service and regulatory functions, and seven assert that their function is service only.

There seems now to be a gradual, but consistent, shifting of opinion about the service-only versus service-regulatory philosophy. Perhaps the inherent struggle for independence by school administrators on the one hand and the dependence upon state-level leadership on the other have contributed to the shift. For example, in Pennsylvania both functions are assigned to intermediate units and seem to support one another. The position of the Pennsylvania State Department of Education is that:

> The intermediate unit . . . provides consultative, advisory or education program services to school districts. The responsibility for administration and program operation belongs to school districts. The intermediate unit provides ancillary services necessary to improve the state system of education (Establishing the Intermediate Unit, 1970: p. v).

This definition of intermediate units in Pennsylvania clearly establishes service as the primary function of the state's regional educational units. At the same time, however, the intermediate units may operate special education programs and area vocational schools and may be responsible

for certain regulatory functions. Because of this experience, adherents of the broader service-regulatory function of intermediate units cite the Pennsylvania program as a more effective way of equalizing educational opportunity.

One sticky issue which concerns regional service center administrators is that of assuring relevant services to both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan school districts. Critical to the success of a regional service center is the ability to utilize the total or very near the total student population of a region to justify and qualify for sufficient funds for a given service. In many, if not most, regions one or two major school districts (generally located in metropolitan areas) enroll a significant number of the regional total. And often there would be an insufficient number of students to even warrant a service center without them. Such major school district administrators may, with some validity, assert that they can provide that service for themselves better than relying upon a service center. The challenge of the service center, then, is to demonstrate that that service can be provided as economically and efficiently to the large school district as the district could provide it for itself while at the same time accommodating smaller districts. Generally speaking, the large districts have taken a benevolent position in this regard but new and more effective relationships must be developed.

Regional Service Center Services

Services offered through regional education service centers or agencies currently range from those which provide merely a planning function to those operating a wide range of specific programs. Many serve only the needs of teachers and administrators while others operate direct-student

programs. Some regional units serve only the schools in a single county while others serve schools in several counties. One of the geniuses of the regional concept is that, with proper enabling legislation, regional programs can be tailored to compensate for the deficits in educational programs. Thus, the centers can not only assure educational equality in a region, but when regional agencies cooperate with each other, the entire state's interests are served.

Tamblyn (1971: p. 12) cites services which these centers may provide to include those to children, teachers, administrators, and the community itself. He outlines example services as follows:

Services to children

a) special education services and programs

b) vocational education programs

c) health and nutritional programs

d) transportation services

e) psychological services

f) special services

g) programs of cultural enrichment

Services to personnel

a) teacher recruitment

b) assignments and supervision of staff

c) curriculum development

d) design and production of instructional materials

e) audio-visual services

f) inservice programs

Administrative services

a) comprehensive planning

b) research and evaluation of programs

c) planning of school buildings

d) centralized purchasing

e) writing proposals for funding of programs

f) dissemination of information to professionals and lay people

Services to the community

a) social service to families

b) programs of cultural enrichment

c) adult and continuing education programs

Although it would be extremely rare for any one service center to operate in all areas cited by Tamblyn, many centers perform a wide range of services. Certain services, of course, apply more to metropolitan than to nonmetropolitan schools; others apply primarily to nonmetropolitan schools while others can be provided to both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan schools. Presented here is a discussion of those services which are appropriate for service centers to provide to both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan schools.

General Services

Planning. Planning is constantly occurring at all levels of the educational enterprise. For example, the teacher plans for the next day's instruction by making a lesson plan; the principal plans when he decides to offer certain courses during the next semester; and the superintendent plans when he determines the number of staff to employ. There is obviously a vast number of areas of school operation in which planning is

an integral part of routine school operation. Although service agencies may be called upon for assistance in some of these activities, they are most appropriately accomplished by the school personnel.

Comprehensive planning, however, is much more complex than this. For the purpose of this discussion, planning, as an activity in which service centers may logically provide assistance, includes the reduction to writing, the conceptualization of and systematic solution to perceived needs. Needs assessment is an important component of the planning process.

Unfortunately, the routine, every-day kind of planning is all that occurs in many schools for two reasons. First, school administrators must devote almost full-time attention to the operational aspects of the school, and second, most schools, particularly nonmetropolitan schools, have either insufficient flexibility in the budget to employ a professional planner or have placed this staff position low on their priority lists. Although few schools have employed planners, most have faced numerous requirements for this talent. It appears that the demand will grow as programs become more sophisticated, and as local, state and federal requirements for accountability increase. Even so, probably only the largest metropolitan schools will be able to afford a planning staff. Thus, the regional service center will become increasingly important as a source for this service.

Awareness. The typical teacher and administrator in schools today--both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan--are well-educated. Practically all have a baccalaureate degree and many have earned a masters degree or beyond. Most are continuously searching for new and improved methods, procedures, programs, and materials. Professional publications and occasional professional conferences and meetings are important sources of such information but are inadequate to serve the total needs of schools. On

the other hand, regional service center staffs are constantly exposed to state and national conferences, state agency personnel, educational equipment and materials vendors, college and university programs and other sources of programmatic information as well as a wide range of literature. Since the center maintains close liasion with school personnel also, the conduct of awareness activities serves an extremely important function which would otherwise not be served.

Specialized Staffing. Specialized services have become more and more important to the success of educational programs. The complexity of today's society is increasing at such a rate that even more specialized programs and activities will be necessary in order for the schools to respond to emerging needs. As a result, we have seen a proliferation of programs designed to prepare people for narrow, technical fields. The unique characteristic of these programs is that of low incidence but high demand. Few metropolitan schools and fewer nonmetropolitan schools will be able to justify highly skilled, full-time specialists because of the low incidence of enrollment. Therefore, one or more specialists may be employed by a regional service center and shared with each regional school having a demand for this talent.

Liaison. Regional service centers provide an avenue of linkage and cooperation between educational agencies and many other governmental and social agencies. In order to provide maximum programs, school administrators must capitalize upon all the sources of information and assistance available. Very often the administrator is not aware of the assistance available from other agencies or the different agencies are not staffed to respond to each school. Acting as a liaison or linkage agent, the regional service center can increase the contact with mutual benefit to each agency.

Other Services

Other than performing those tasks required by statute or by the state education agency, two essential conditions must exist in order for regional service centers to be worthwhile to schools: 1) the receiving agency must want a specified service, and 2) the regional service center must be capable of delivering that service. If either condition is absent, very little real benefit accrues from service center involvement.

As a general rule, however, receiving agencies, the schools, want many more services than the regional service center can support financially. This results in the establishment of priorities of services rendered with funds available, and the astute regional service center chief executive will arrive at a consensus among his clients when establishing these priorities. Of the other services not mandated by statutes or state agencies, the following seem most appropriate for nonmetropolitan as well as metropolitan schools.

Instructional Services

Precise delineations between instructional and other kinds of services are difficult because practically all activity of regional service centers ultimately impacts on instruction. Many regional agencies, however, do engage in direct instructional operations, examples of which are cited here.

Driver Education. Driver education has typically been a fairly low-priority course or subject in most school systems. Typically, teachers of other subjects have been assigned one or two periods of driver education or have taught the course outside regular school hours. Numerous studies indicate that driver education deserves amplified attention.

While the use of driver simulator equipment, multimedia-equipped classrooms and driving ranges have become rather well accepted necessities

in quality driver education programs, the attendant costs are prohibitive for any schools other than very large ones. As evidenced in El Paso and Dallas, large schools also experience considerable savings when they participate in a regionalized program.

The program conducted by Region XIX Education Service Center in El Paso serves as an example of a regionalized driver education program. This center utilizes four 16-place driver simulators and three multimedia classrooms, all mounted in 60-foot mobile trailers. The total cost of this equipment is approximately $310,000--a cost which no single district could afford, and no single district could utilize all units all the time. Further, the regional staff consists of 29 specially trained personnel. Even the largest school district would encounter difficulty in fully utilizing these personnel, and smaller school systems would be unable to afford them at all. Instructional teams move from school to school, as scheduled, without regard for school district boundaries.

Special Education. Regional service centers have been involved nationally in providing direct instructional services in special education perhaps more extensively than any other area of the school program. Services rendered by centers, typically, have been supplementary to that provided by the local districts, and extensions of the state education agencies. Indirect instructional services include 1) the provision of materials through Special Education Instructional Materials Centers (SEIMCs), branches thereof, or other libraries of such materials, or 2) consultation in programs, planning, and administration.

Direct instructional service is most commonly provided in student learning diagnosis and, in some cases, provision of instructional programs

which local districts either cannot afford operating independently, or determine that regional programs are more economical. Smaller school systems, typically nonmetropolitan, normally have only a few children who suffer from handicapping conditions. The smaller number of children involved, usually with different kinds of handicaps, makes it virtually impossible to provide the comprehensive services these students need. Therefore, the regional service center, serving as the organization through which local districts can share their resources, provides an opportunity to offer special education resources to virtually every area of the country.

Other Instructional Services. The provision of non-mandated services by regional service centers should supplement rather than supplant school programs. With this philosophy as a reference point, many other instructional services can be provided to both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan which enhance their programs. The key, of course, is the desire of school districts to cooperate.

Examples of other instructional programs in operation throughout the country include vocational programs (including area vocational schools), guidance and testing programs, pre-school programs, and adult education programs. In each of these areas, limited enrollment potentials resulting in higher per-capita costs prohibit most nonmetropolitan schools from developing such programs. However, when resources from each school are combined with the resources of other schools, more comprehensive total programming becomes feasible.

Instructional Support Services

As stated in the previous section, delineation between instructional services and instructional support services sometimes becomes clouded. However, probably regional service centers' primary forte is in providing

instructional support services. The most common instructional support services offered by regional centers include media materials and services, inservice programs for educators, consultant assistance, curriculum development, and educational applications of data processing.

There is a number of reasons why regional service centers are more active in instructional support services than any other area.

First, large investments in materials, equipment and personnel prohibit all but the very largest schools from providing these services independently. For example, the value of the Region XIX Education Service Center media materials and equipment exceeds two million dollars--an investment that even the largest school in the region would be hard pressed to afford. Yet, only some 93 to 94 per cent of requests for media materials by teachers in that district are filled because of scheduling conflicts. Smaller nonmetropolitan districts, of course, would probably never have sufficient resources to provide teachers the necessary materials.

The second reason instructional support services are the most popular ones with school districts is that such support is non-threatening to school administrators. Whenever <u>any</u> outside agency participates in planning, administering or instructing, there is a danger that school administrators will feel that some of their prerogatives are being usurped. This is very seldom the case with instructional <u>support</u> services.

A third reason for the popularity of instructional support services as a service center activity is the visibility of such services. Even the most conservative educator or layman can easily see advantages gained in this area. Accountability can thus be established and documented more easily than any other area of activity.

Administrative Services

The consideration for regional service centers operating in the administrative services area parallel fairly closely those in the general and instructional areas. Even greater care must be exercised, however, to assure that the regional service center does not "take over" responsibilities which properly belong to the school district. For example, regional service center staffs are frequently requested to assist school districts with developing and writing proposals. This is a valuable administrative service rendered by many regional service centers. However, unless great care is exercised, the regional center staff person will be tempted by his own convictions to include goals, objectives, operational procedures, or other conditions which should be determined by school district officers. These may go unnoticed by school personnel until after the proposal is approved and funded and then they may be committed to something that is inconsistent with school policy. Other examples could be cited, but this one illustrates the point. Each time the regional service center commits such violation, its effectiveness, at least with the school involved, is compromised.

Prudent management of regional service centers can produce a number of invaluable, well-accepted, economical administrative services to regional schools, however. Typical administrative services provided to both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan schools include data processing, transportation, cooperative purchasing, classified employee training such as for custodians and bus drivers, and administration of migrant and adult programs. In each of these areas of activity the administrators in one region may enthusiastically support the regional management of the activity while administrators in an adjoining region may feel that the same activity should be managed

differently. Regional service centers must have sufficient flexibility to identify those unique characteristics of regions and respond in the most effective ways.

Conclusions

In this discussion of the function of regional service centers in serving both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan schools no effort was made to justify service centers, to compare and describe services in the different states, or to review the literature relating to service centers or intermediate units. Those topics have been explored by other authors. Rather, the purpose of this presentation was to present some introspective considerations for regional service centers' identification of ways to become integral, useful partners in the education enterprise.

More than ample evidence is available to document the value of regional service agencies to nonmetropolitan schools, particularly the smaller ones. The more troublesome task is to discover and operationalize services which provide additional advantages to larger schools. Without the blending of services which will accommodate both populations, there is a great danger of the larger schools' decreasing support of the regional service concept which would compromise--if not destroy--regional service agencies in some regions. However, this author is convinced that intelligent, cooperative planning involving both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan educators as well as regional and state officials can carry the regional service concept to maximum fruition in the provision of equal educational opportunity for all children.

REFERENCES

Establishing the Intermediate Unit. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania State Department of Education, 1970. (ED 047 394, 56 pp.)

Tamblyn, Lewis R. Rural Education in the United States. Washington, D.C.: Rural Education Association, 1971.